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SUBJECT: POLISH PRESIDENT REQUESTS PUTIN MEETING AT KATYN

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells
for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Polish President Kaczynski surprised the GOR on September 4 by conveying his interest in a visit to Katyn and Smolensk on September 17, the date the Soviet Red Army seized eastern Poland in 1939, and requesting a meeting with President Putin. Polish Charge d'Affaires Zbigniew Rzonca told us President Kaczynski proposed that the two presidents and spouses meet in Katyn to jointly commemorate the murder of Polish army officers by the Soviets in 1939. (Note: The Polish government-sponsored ceremony generally involves Russian regional officials and Ambassador-level Polish attendance. End note.) Rzonca stressed to the MFA that the meeting would be "constructive," a positive step in the Russian-Polish dialogue, with the goal of symbolizing the movement away from the tragic past to a better future between the two countries. Rzonca clarified that Kaczynski's visit was not tied to any initiative to resolve specific frictions in the GOR-GOP relationship, including the GOR meat embargo.

¶2. (C) As of September 6, the MFA had not categorically ruled out a meeting, but stressed the factors that made it unlikely: the date proposed seemed designed to play on historical animosities; the absence of any preparation; and Putin's full schedule. Rzonca told us that his Russian counterparts did not understand what changed Poland's approach to bilateral affairs so drastically, contrasting it to the Polish foreign minister's failure to respond to FM Lavrov's invitation to meet in Moscow. Presidential administration staff told Rzonca that Putin alone would make the decision on the Polish initiative.

¶3. (C) Comment: While putting a positive spin on his President's proposal, Rzonca appeared braced for a Russian rejection. The GOR will likely view this proposal through the prism of Poland's electoral cycle, and is unlikely to view Katyn as the appropriate backdrop for GOR-Polish relations.
Burns